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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS FORTY-FIRST SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Moderator's summary of the panel discussion and dialogue on women in power and decision-making

1. The Beijing Platform for Action[1] emphasized that a comprehensive, broad-based approach to women's empowerment was essential if women were to fully participate and be represented in decision-making at all levels in political, economic and social life. Women's political participation and representation are inextricably linked to wider issues of economic empowerment; education and training; human rights; social attitudes; values; and social support systems. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making would provide the balance that was needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.

Ways and means for promoting women's participation and equal representation in power and decision-making

2. The absence of women as key decision makers in the political process continued to be an issue of critical concern in developed and developing countries. The unequal representation of women in decision-making was depriving countries of talent and wisdom, as well as diverse styles of decision-making. The persistent absence of women in preventive diplomacy and peace negotiations was noted as a particular concern. Barriers to women's participation included stereotypes, tradition and competition in political parties and with the "old boys' network". It was noted that the political will for more women to function

in politics was often missing. The particular situation of women in countries and regions undergoing transition and consolidating democracy was highlighted.

3. Poverty, lack of access to basic resources, lack of access to political party lists, low salaries and discrimination in the workplace were noted as root causes of women's under-representation in political decision-making. If women had to be concerned with survival, there was little time left for assuming positions of leadership and political power. Recognition of women's unpaid work and the need for sharing of family and household responsibilities, along with training in non-traditional skills, were mentioned as key factors to help explain why so few women worldwide participated actively in power and political decision-making.

4. Ways and means for promoting increased participation by women in political decision-making and conflict resolution, and for achieving gender balance in decision-making bodies at all levels, were discussed. Quotas and targets in legislatures and political parties were suggested as necessary to accelerate the equal representation of women in politics. Some noted, however, the controversial nature of quotas and stressed that they should be used only as a temporary solution. Some considered that women should still enter into power strictly on the basis of competition.

5. Electoral reform, specifically the adoption of proportional representation in place of plurality systems, was a possible means for increasing the percentage of women in parliaments. One approach suggested that there should be no less than 30-40 per cent and no more than 60-70 per cent of either sex in decision-making positions. Rosters of qualified women, as well as the setting of targets and ranking of candidates on party lists, were also cited as means for increasing women's participation. Further research was needed on electoral systems and ways and means of reforming the practice of political parties from a gender perspective.

6. Attention was drawn to the general recommendation prepared by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, concerning women's role in public life, and to the importance of the Convention in strengthening women's rights overall.

7. Women's right to vote was considered to be a fundamental human right that women should exercise universally. Women's votes were increasingly serving as a means of influencing political activity and shaping political value systems, including approaches to peace-building and peacemaking, but much remained to be done in this area. Voter registration and education campaigns were cited as tools for increasing voting by women.

8. Women's participation in preventive diplomacy and negotiations at the peace table were considered to be essential to achieving peace and development and for diverting military expenditures for peaceful purposes. It was suggested that decision-making processes, involving both women and men, including in situations of intrastate conflict, could help to create a more peaceful approach.

9. The importance of creating national machineries, inter-ministerial bodies, national committees and women's bureaux to ensure women's equal participation in all aspects of decision-making, with adequate levels of staffing and funding, and located at the centre of political power, was cited as critical. In addition, the mainstreaming of gender issues in institutions was noted as another means to promote the advancement of women in decision-making. The need for effective monitoring mechanisms was emphasized, with time-bound targets and measurable indicators to evaluate progress.

10. Ways and means for maintaining women in public office once elected or appointed were deemed to be extremely important. Gender-sensitive pressure groups were mentioned as an important tool for maintaining women in public office. In keeping women in power, greater harmonization between professional work and family responsibilities for both men and women was considered essential. Increasingly, parents were reluctant to forfeit time with their families. Greater sharing of parental and household responsibilities between women and men was deemed to be paramount. Recognition of women's unpaid work, need for flexible working hours and sharing of family responsibilities with men, and the need for women to participate in decision-making at the household level, were also cited.

11. The importance of education and training to enable women to have greater control over their lives was emphasized. Training for women candidates in the conduct of electoral campaigns and fund-raising had proved to be important for effecting the election of women to public office. Once in office, women often needed training in parliamentary procedures and budgetary matters. Leadership training was considered essential for women at all levels including the community level, including in rural areas.

12. Girls' and boys' education as a means of breaking down traditional stereotypes and promoting acceptance of diversity and women's right to participate in decision-making was emphasized. The revision of education curricula and textbooks still remained an important means of eliminating gender-based stereotypes. Attitudinal change was considered to be especially important at the earliest stages of life when boys and girls had not yet internalized sex stereotypes.

13. The role of the media in perpetuating sex stereotypes was noted and the need to ensure a positive view of women and portrayal of girls in non-traditional roles was noted. Continued stereotyping of women and their negative portrayal as sex objects on television and in films undermined the struggle for women's equality. The value of stimulating public debate on the diverse roles of women, particularly in public life and in the family, was emphasized. Despite the growing presence of professional women in the media, decisions about editorial content and production issues were still largely controlled by men.

14. An urgent need was identified for case studies on "women making a difference" and for the creation of a database to monitor women's participation in government, corporations, political parties, trade unions, international organizations and the military. The Internet was noted as a new means to disseminate and share gender statistics and information on women's leadership

strategies, activities of national machineries for women's advancement, affirmative action measures and other means for changing perceptions of women's role in public life.

Networking and building partnerships

15. Women needed to seek greater partnership with men and to build coalitions and strengthen alliances to advocate for women's political empowerment and representation. Mentoring, including for women by women, was cited as important. Women leaders and older women and men represented a valuable resource for mentoring young women as future leaders. Networks among women leaders in politics and in other areas had helped served as a basis for expanding national and international coalitions. National and regional women's parliamentary caucuses should also include women from the private sector and the civil service. Specialized committees to promote gender issues and to sponsor legislation have also proved beneficial. The mainstreaming of "women's issues", such as social services, the environment, and accessible childcare, has led to their becoming issues of concern to society as a whole as a result of increased presence of women in public policy making.

16. International organizations, Governments, non-governmental organizations and women parliamentarians should join in partnership to support with funding the development of women leaders through training, so as to facilitate their entry into the political arena; and an enabling environment should be established for women's full participation and equal representation in power and political decision-making.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[2] General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.